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PLAY AND RECREATION

BY GEORGE E. JOHNSON, A.M.,

Assistant Professor of Education, Harvard University.

It is less than a generation since educators began saying much about the educational value of recreation. Yet many schoolmasters of former years were sensible of its value. The able but eccentric Mr. Moody, the first principal of Dummer Academy (Mass.), so the history of that school tells us, used to regulate the school day by the tide, in order that the boys might have the best time for bathing. But with a few notable exceptions the teacher's interest in the past has been in the physical value rather than the educational value of recreation. Recuperation, not education, has been the conscious justification of school yards and recesses.

INCREASED INTEREST IN PLAY AND RECREATION

There have been several causes contributing to the increased interest of the last few years in recreation and play. As the first of these we may mention the rapid increase in the growth of cities, and the disappearance of the play opportunities of city children. Kindliness first stimulated the attempt to provide better play opportunities than the streets could afford. But in social matters, kindliness is generally the best policy, and it was soon recognized that better play opportunities decreased the number of accidents and lessened mischief. Students began to seek additional grounds for the belief that the play facilities of children should be improved. An opportunity for this came through the child-study movement. With a more intelligent interest in children and a better understanding of their nature and needs came the realization of the truly educational and social value of play. Psychology, taking direction more and more from the study of the original tendencies and original nature of man, emphasized more and more the significance of the instinctive interests and play activities of children. Meantime, the relation of commercialized recreation to the social welfare of youth came to be more clearly recognized, and some of the more serious evils of misguided recreation, in various communities, were carefully

studied. So also came the realization of the opportunities in recreation for the social mingling of the different racial groups, and the wearing down of prejudice and increase of mutual good will and understanding, so necessary for a truly national spirit in a democracy made up of mixed races like ours.

AGENCIES ACTIVE IN PROMOTING PLAY AND RECREATION

Hence it came about that philanthropists, educators, parents, citizens grew more and more disturbed at the old *laissez-faire* attitude of the school and the community in the matter of recreation and play. Philanthropic societies, such as social settlements, Young Men's Christian Associations, Young Women's Christian Associations, boys' club organizations, and others including churches and Sunday schools, increased their efforts to provide wholesome play and recreation. Park departments were stimulated to a more efficient appeal to the people to use the parks and to bring "breathing places" to the people. Groups of men and women, eager for immediate progress and impatient of the existing slow moving agencies, formed playground associations. Municipalities, awakened to the popular need and demand, created play and recreation commissions. Meantime the schools were attempting to appeal more and more to the play interests of children in their methods of teaching, and to meet more wisely the recreational needs of their pupils. It required little pressure, in some communities, to induce boards of education to appropriate money for supervision of play and recreation, and to open the school buildings in the evening for social and recreational uses of the community.

TYPES OF PLAY AND RECREATION CENTERS ESTABLISHED

Naturally the type of play and recreation center that these various organizations established took color from the character of the organization developing it. The social workers established boys' and girls' clubs, settlement houses with indoor gymnasiums, playrooms, club rooms, and the like; sometimes small outdoor playgrounds and settlement farms for summer vacation outings. The park board equipped portions of the large parks for play activities, converted small squares into playgrounds, and sometimes established so-called recreation parks, with children's playgrounds, swimming pools, athletic fields, and field houses. Recreation com-

missions most commonly established recreation parks, and small playgrounds, and concerned themselves somewhat in the oversight of commercialized recreation centers. Playground associations utilized school yards, vacant lots, small park areas, school buildings, and sometimes established recreation parks with buildings, through the financial aid of the municipality. School boards organized school playgrounds, supplied playrooms and gymnasiums, swimming pools and sometimes athletic fields. They established vacation schools in the summer, and evening social and recreation centers in the winter.

The above, in a general way, suggests how the type of center varied according to the type of administration. Which type of administration has the greatest natural advantages is a mooted question which it is not the purpose of this article to discuss at any length. But it is the purpose of the article to suggest the great natural opportunity, even responsibility of the school, in the matter of play and recreation among children and adults; and it may appropriately be shown that, in the matter of administration, the school has great and unique advantages.

ADMINISTRATION OF PLAY AND RECREATION

Mr. Lee F. Hanmer, Director of Department of Recreation, Russell Sage Foundation, enumerates five planks of good administration of play and recreation as follows:

1. Adequate funds
2. Competent leaders
3. Authority in proper hands in all lines of work
4. Complete control of property
5. Freedom from political control;

To these we might add a sixth:

6. Proper coordination with other departments of the municipality.

THE SCHOOL AS AN AGENCY FOR ADMINISTRATION

There is no other department of civic affairs which tax payers so willingly support as the public schools. In some states, the board of education has direct taxing power, a power seldom possessed by other agencies concerned in the conduct of play and recreation. Among school officials and educators are included the larger number of those who are conversant with the needs and nature of childhood and youth, the educational and social aspects of play and recreation,

and the administrative problems involved. Boards of education have developed their organizations; differentiated their functions, and recognized the expert equally with, if not to a greater extent than, any other organization controlling play and recreation activities. School boards have long had complete control of property used in educational work. School boards are not always free from political control, but far and wide they are unquestionably more free from bad politics than any other elective bodies of equally wide civic influence. In the matter of proper coördination with other departments of the municipality, the board of education may be at a disadvantage as compared to one or another of the forms of administration mentioned; but if this is so, it is largely due to the fact that hitherto the functions of the board of education have not necessarily involved coördination with other departments of municipal government to the extent that would be necessary if it administered play and recreation. It is a weakness, if it really exists, that is easily remedied.

Thus on the administrative side, the schools seem to hold great natural advantages, and these advantages are more apparent from the fact that the administration of the public schools necessarily involves play and recreation to a large extent, whatsoever other agencies may be doing. The school cannot do its specific work without concerning itself with play and recreation. Moreover, the economical administration of play and recreation requires the use of properties under board of education control. Where play and recreation systems have been developed apart from the public school system, there have been unnecessary expenditures, duplications, or complications of responsibility and authority. With an equal outlay of money, it is safe to say that the school could do very much more, and do it very much more quickly, than any other agency that has been tried. Another matter of importance to consider is the close and intimate touch of the school with the clientele. For generations the school has been in the midst of the people, it has been the means of unification of the various groups, it has often provided the most natural and suitable accommodations for civic expression, and has grown more dear to the hearts of the people as a whole than any other social agency. It seems, therefore, that the opportunity of the public school in the matter of recreation and play among children and adults rises to a duty.

WHAT THE SCHOOL SHOULD DO

What should the school do? It is not possible in this brief paper to suggest adequately the things the school might and ought to do to further recreation and play among children and adults. Some things, however, may be emphasized:

I. For Children

(1) **THE RECESS SHOULD BE A PART OF THE SCHOOL PROGRAM.**—The recess in this country is as venerable as the school itself, but unfortunately in recent years, in many school systems, it has been practically abandoned, often on the grounds that evils of a moral and social nature attend it—evils, really, that a well conducted recess could avert more effectively than any other single influence. Literature suggestive of the right conduct of the recess is abundant,¹ and any teacher with the spirit to do it can successfully solve the recess problems. If the yard is small, it is of advantage for different classes to have their recesses in rotation. Indeed, it may be of great advantage to do so in any case.

(2) **THERE SHOULD BE AFTER-SCHOOL PLAY IN THE SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS.**—Many schools discourage all use of the school playgrounds out of school hours. This is a great mistake for it deprives children of needed play incentives and leadership, and turns them over to the streets and vacant lots for play under far less desirable conditions than would attend after-school free play on the school premises.

(3) **THE SCHOOL SHOULD ORGANIZE PLAY.**—Well within the elementary school age come the organizing tendencies of boys and girls. It is a great mistake, however, to assume that children do or can sufficiently organize of themselves for their play. In so far as play is social (and it is that quite as truly as it is physical) there lies great advantage in a "regular team" over a scrub team. Incentives for and guidance in organization are essential for large success in the play of elementary school children. The school is the only agency that can see to it that all the children have opportunity for organized play, which, we might add, is the first great step towards national "preparedness." There should be team games for every able-bodied boy and girl of the upper elementary grades. The

¹ See Johnson, G. E., *What to Do at Recess*. Ginn & Co., Boston.

organizing of intra-school games is a minimum essential in our efforts for the moral and physical education of our school children, and some inter-school sports, even in elementary grades, are most desirable. This will be more apparent, doubtless, if one realizes that the number of mature and maturing boys in elementary grades actually equals or surpasses that of mature and maturing boys in the high schools. Adolescent needs cannot be wisely considered for the high school period only.

(4) THE SCHOOL SHOULD PROMOTE AVOCATIONAL INTERESTS, and may do so to greater advantage than any other existing form of play and recreation administration. Among these may be mentioned the following:

(a) The school can readily stimulate those activities of children that put them in intelligent and appreciative touch with nature, such as gardening, animal husbandry, collection and study of objects of nature, flowers, leaves, minerals, insects, etc., "hiking," hunting with the camera, and even outdoor life and camping. If so disposed, in these extra school activities, the school can utilize, if need be, volunteer help as well as any other organization, while it has within its corps of workers, always, some who have ability and willingness for leadership on these lines.

(b) Extra-school musical activities can readily be fostered by the school. Great success has attended inter-school competition in singing, competition between classes, glee clubs and double quartets. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, competition stimulated between high schools by the director of music has been conducted with great success under boy directors. Money earned by school orchestras has been used to purchase instruments which have been loaned to pupils who otherwise would be unable to learn to play.

(c) Competition in dramatics between classes in schools has been tried with complete success. Those interests offer lines of extra-school activities of great recreational, as well as social and educational value. The right leadership of the dramatic interests would do much to aid various subjects for the school curriculum, and safeguard the emotional experiences of children and youth, so endangered under existing conditions in many modern communities.

(d) The creative activities of boys and girls along lines of toy-making, carpentry, mechanics, boat building, wireless telegraphy, doll play, sewing, bead work, cooking, and many others, need but

little effort on the part of the school to be tremendously stimulated to great recreational and educational benefit of the boys and girls. In some cities, thousands of boys have competed in kite and aeroplane making and flying, and junior expositions have awakened great interest and discovered unsuspected talent.

These few suggestions have been made with the view of indicating how the school can easily and effectively guide play and recreation activities of children and youth; also to suggest that, in doing so, the school is performing a great service to adult recreation; for the best forms of adult recreation depend upon habits formed in earlier years. Unless an interest be nurtured and developed in the earlier years of life, there remains no adequate basis for active interest in later life. The problem of the recreation for adults is, to a large extent, involved in the problem of the play of children and youth. With this in mind we may suggest a few things that the school might do also.

II. For Adults

(1) THE SCHOOL PREMISES SHOULD PROVIDE ATTRACTIVE BREATHING PLACES FOR THE NEIGHBORHOOD.—As has already been said, they are set in the midst of the people. So far as they go, the school yards might supply open spots for the near residents, as well as parks and squares. If the school system is developed with consideration of the play and recreational needs of the neighborhood, opportunities for recreation may be provided at less expense than equally satisfactory ones could be provided in any other way, duplication would be avoided, and, in general, such opportunities would be the most convenient for the public.

(2) THE SCHOOL BUILDINGS SHOULD BE OPEN FOR EVENING USE.—With some attention to play and recreational needs in school architecture, the school buildings might become admirably adapted to the recreational needs of adults. Even existing school buildings of the older types can lend themselves, in a degree, to recreational uses. The various recreational activities suggested for children and youth open the way for activities for adults. The social and civic activities of pupils might contribute directly to similar activities of adults. The music activities and contests might serve not only as means of entertainment, but might feed into the adult organizations year by year. Out of the musical activities might develop

the neighborhood chorals, orchestras, bands; out of the dramatic activities might develop the neighborhood theatre; and out of these neighborhood groups might be developed city orchestras, bands and theatres.

In brief, the school is the great socializing agency of the community. This social preëminence it holds by virtue of tradition, location, prestige, claims upon childhood, organization, leadership, social outlook and command of funds. "What you wish to appear in the nation, you must put into the schools." The social aspects of play and recreation, now so universally recognized, place upon the school a great responsibility but glorious opportunity. To falter, to delay, to side-step, to leave for other agencies what it can best do itself, would be for the school a moral failure.

Johnson, *What to do at Recess*, Ginn & Co.